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South Carolina House of Representatives

Legislative Update & Research Reports

Ramon Schwartz, Jr., Speaker of the House

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Legislative Update

School Financing in Some Other States

With public education in South Carolina under discussion in the House, these brief reports of how other states are approaching school finance might be of interest.

Connecticut might increase state aid to local school districts to 50 percent of costs. The plan, proposed by the state Board of Education, would have state aid increase to \$585.5 million. Currently the state provides \$377.8 million to local systems under a Guaranteed Tax Base formula, designed to prevent unfair differences between rich and poor districts. Connecticut has a low ranking in state aid to public schools--45th out of 50 states.

Florida legislators are seeking ways to garner an estimated \$2.6 billion to modernize school buildings and replace equipment over the next five years. Florida expects its school enrollment to rise to 1.56 million by 1986. Legislators are especially concerned about the extension of the special capital projects property tax, now used by 41 counties for school buildings. This tax, which is a local option tax, will expire in June, 1985 unless extended. This year it raised nearly \$296 million for school building and equipment--but new sources may be needed.

The Georgia House has passed a 1-cent sales tax increase, matched by a "dollar for dollar rollback" in state property taxes. The purpose is to provide more school finance aid without high property taxes. Property tax savings would be limited to no more than \$1,000 per taxpayer, in order to prevent large landowners receiving windfalls. If passed by the Senate the tax plan would be presented to Georgia voters in a referendum.

Kansas is considering \$50 million more in education aid, chiefly to raise teacher salaries. Kansas is attempting to make teacher pay more competitive with other states. Governor Carlin wants to get the money by shifting spending from other areas. Kansas school systems currently receive \$466 million in state aid.

Maryland Governor Hughes has called for \$60 million more in public school aid to be funded by savings in the state pension system and a small increase in the corporate income tax. Hughes supports a \$605 million package developed by his Task Force to Study the Funding of Public Education. One controversial part of the plan would lower the state's contributions to employee pensions, including cost-of-living raises for some retirees. The proposals would increase spending from \$1.68 billion this year to \$1.73 billion in 1985.

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Michigan Governor Blanchard wants to increase spending for public education (8% in public education) but not raise taxes. The hard-hit Michigan economy is just now beginning to revive, and a tax increase at this time could be damaging--and politically impractical. Governor Blanchard feels that an improving economic situation and careful budgeting can provide the additional funds.

Missouri is facing a reduction in state foundation aid to its public schools because the legislature decided against any new tax increases this year. Individual and corporate income taxes would have been raised for the first time in 13 years. The money is needed because of the \$60 million needed for desegregation of St. Louis area schools.

New Mexico Governor Anaya has reduced his proposed education budget from \$273 million o \$173 million and called for a 1-cent increase in the sales tax. An extra \$112 million would be siphoned to school districts.

Oklahoma's legislature is considering a bill to provide a uniform equalization formula on local property taxes. Experts at the University of Oklahoma estimate that equalization would bring in \$58 million more for public schools. Currently Oklahoma property is assessed anywhere from 9 percent to 13.42 percent of full market value; the proposed plan would set a uniform rate of 12 percent.

[Source: From the State Capitals, February, 1984]

Education Improvement--The Generic Version

The various education improvement plans being discussed by the House differ mainly in the time-table of implementation and the amount of funding required. The program activities of the plans are, in their basic points, very similar.

The brief outline below gives the key points of the education plan as developed by the House Ways and Means Committee. The Committee, working with suggestions from the Governor's Task Force, and comments and ideas from individual House members produced a plan that is substantially similar to that proposed by the Governor.

Update & Reports, working with staff of the Ways and Means Committee and the Education and Public Works Committee, has pared the Committee plan down to its key points. Since this plan contains the essential points of all plans, it is presented here for your review.

RAISING STUDENT PERFORMANCE

I. Increase academic standards

Require 20 credits for graduation (now 18)' require high school students have passing average to participate in interscholastic activities; require schools to offer college preparatory programs.

II. Strengthen discipline and attendance

State Board of Education to establish regulations on conduct and provide a system to enforce these regulations; Boards of Trustees shall have authority to impose standards of conduct and enforce them; absences of more than 10 days will be acted on by School Boards.

III. Provide more effective use of classroom time

The instructional day will be 6 hours; 5 year olds must attend kindergarten; child development programs for 4 year olds may be established by local Boards; Saturdays may not be used as make-up days to meet the 185 day requirement.

IV. Provide programs for talented students

School districts shall establish Advanced Placement courses in secondary schools for all gifted and talented students by August, 1986, and all gifted and talented students shall be provided appropriate programs.

V. Provide relevant vocational training programs

Schools must provide specific vocational training programs that lead to 50% of participants being placed in jobs for the program to continue. The General Assembly to provide funds for equipment in these programs. Provides for monitoring and review of program success.

VI. Provide programs for handicapped

Programs will be available for mentally, physically and emotionally handicapped students.

STRENGTHEN BASIC SKILLSVII. Require exit exam for graduation

Starting in 85-86 10th graders will take an exit exam; those who fail must take remedial courses. Students entering 10th grade in 89-90 and after must pass the test to graduate.

VIII. Enact a promotion policy

The State Board of Education will establish a statewide minimum promotion policy for grades 1-6 with academic standards in reading and math. Students who do not meet these standards will have to take remedial courses. These regulations will go into effect for two grades each year starting with grades 1 and 2 in 86-87.

IX. Improve basic skills in all grades

Provide 1/2 day programs for 4 year olds with deficiencies; provide remedial programs for students with problems in basic skills--reading, writing, math, and general first grade readiness. Provide additional funds for remedial programs through the Education Finance Act. Strengthen basic skills instruction in science.

STRENGTHEN TEACHER TRAINING, EVALUATION AND PAYX. Increase number of teachers

Schools and colleges to emphasize teaching as a career. The Commission on Higher Education to operate a loan program for teacher education students, with 1/5 of the loan to be forgiven for each year the teacher teaches in an area that has a need for teachers. Provisional teaching certificates can be granted to persons who have a BA degree but lack teacher education course work.

XI. Raise teacher salaries

Set minimum salary schedule; and try to keep teacher salary at the southeastern average.

XII. Improve teacher training

State Board of Education to develop additional standards for teacher education programs; have selected colleges and universities develop centers of excellence in education; provide better in-service training for teachers.

XI. Maximize teaching time

Increase school year from 185 to 190 days with 5 extra in-service days for teachers. Reduce teacher paperwork load. Establish minimum performance standards for teachers and provide a fair system of evaluation of teachers, with unsatisfactory teachers to be weeded out of education system.

IMPROVE LEADERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND FISCAL EFFICIENCY

XIV. Recruit able principals and administrators

Starting in 85-86 principals must be assessed by state Department of Education; colleges and universities to increase requirements in school administration courses; a statewide incentive program for administrators and evaluation of administrators will be implemented by the State Board.

XV. Improve training and evaluation of administrators

State Board to establish guidelines for training and evaluation of administrators and provide training programs for them.

XVI. Require all school board members to be elected

Does not apply to county boards of education.

IMPLEMENT QUALITY CONTROLS AND REWARD PRODUCTIVITY

XVII. Evaluate and reward schools on their performance

Establish a competitive grant program for schools to implement programs that improve education.

XVIII. Focus planning on instructional improvement

School advisory report becomes school improvement report; school advisory council becomes school improvement council.

XVIX. Monitor implementation of program

Provide for an annual review of activities in education under the plan by an independent review body.

XX. State Superintendent intervention

May intervene in districts where the quality of education is impaired.

CREATE PARTNERSHIP AMONG SCHOOLS, PARENTS, COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS

XVI. Develop policies to:

1. Increase parent involvement in education
2. Increase business participation in education
3. Increase community involvement in education.